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CH'AN NEWS LETTER

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Generating Bodhi Mind

A talk on the *Surangama Sutra* given by Master Sheng-yen on January 3, 1993.

Thereat the World Honored One said to the great bodhisattvas and great arahats in the Assembly, "I want to ask you, bodhisattvas and arahats, who are born from Buddhadharma and have reached the state beyond study, this question: when you developed your minds to awaken to the eighteen fields of sense, which one did you regard as the best means of perfection and by what methods did you enter the state of Samadhi?"

In this section of the *Surangama Sutra*, in response to the Buddha's question, twenty-five great bodhisattvas describe the methods they used to enter into Samadhi. The methods of practice which lead to Samadhi are called dharma doors. The Buddha's question addressed the great bodhisattvas and arahats. Arahats are Buddhist saints of the Hinayana tradition. Why does the Buddha question them in a sutra which teaches the Mahayana Path?

The disciples of the Buddha present when he delivered the *Surangama Sutra* appear as Hinayana practitioners, yet they have generated the Mahayana bodhisattva mind. What do we mean by "appear as Hinayana practitioners?" Traditionally, Mahayana literature uses the term "Hinayana practitioner" dialectically, to mean a Buddhist who pursues his own salvation, rather than the salvation of all sentient beings. Such a person wishes to go beyond the five desires (related to form, sound, smell, taste and touch), beyond vexations, and beyond the cycle of birth and death (samsara). He dedicates himself to leaving behind the world and worldly activity. In contrast, a Mahayana bodhisattva practices for the benefit of all beings. He does not leave behind the five desires nor is he attached to them. He lives in the world, but is not attached to it.

What about ordinary sentient beings? We live in the world, we are attached to the world, and we are motivated by the five desires. In this sense, we are neither Hinayana practitioners nor are we bodhisattvas.

A Hinayana practitioner does not necessarily have to be a bhikshu, a "left-home person," meaning a monk. A beginning Hinayana practitioner may be a lay person. However, at the fourth and final

“fruition,” the stage of the arhat, a Hinayana practitioner is always a bhikshu. A Mahayana bodhisattva may be a left-home person or a lay person at any point on the path, and may seem indistinguishable from an ordinary sentient being.

There is a common misunderstanding that a left-home person is always a Hinayana practitioner, because he has left behind the five desires and renounced the life of an ordinary person. This is a mistake. People sometimes say to me “Shih-fu, you are a monk so you are only a Hinayana practitioner. We are bodhisattvas because we live in the midst of the five desires, but we are not motivated by them.” If such self-proclaimed bodhisattvas practice for their own benefit, or if, when a question of self interest arises, they are motivated by selfish considerations, they are not bodhisattvas or Hinayana practitioners.

The Buddha uses the term, “great arahats.” If there are great arahats, does that mean there are small arahats? Arahats are “without outflow” or “without leaking.” If great arahats are without outflow are there small arahats who have outflow?

“Arahat” means “worthy of making offerings to.” An arahat has attained liberation from samsara and desire, and thus is worthy of receiving offerings. As it is used here, a “great arahat” has attained liberation and has simultaneously generated the bodhisattva mind, or Bodhi Mind. He vows to help all sentient beings. Bodhi Mind is the altruistic mind of enlightenment. A great arhat has the mental disposition of a bodhisattva. Of course, as an arhat who practices the Hinayana tradition, he must be a left-home person.

An arahat is always “without outflows,” or “without leaking,” so his merit and virtue will never again decrease. How can merit and virtue decrease? Imagine a balloon with a puncture or a bucket with a hole. Whatever is inside will

eventually flow out. The state of mind which produces vexations is like the hole. If there is no hole there will be no outflows or leaks.

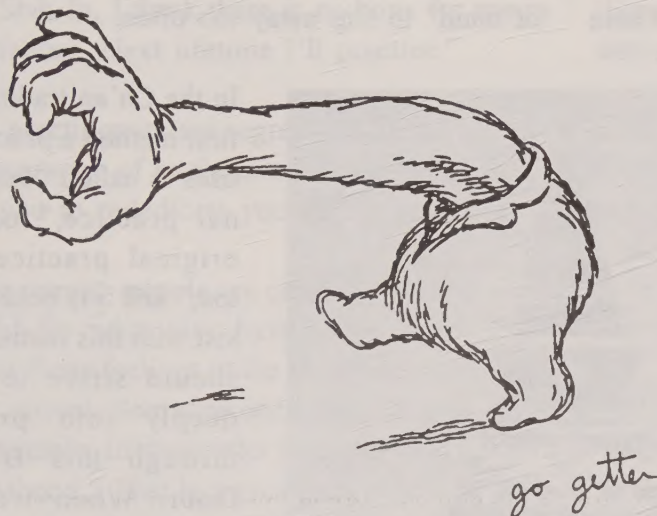
An Arahant has perfected his practice to the point where his merit and virtue will never again decrease. Ordinary people sometimes help sentient beings, and sometimes harm them. A crude example would be that you see somebody having difficulty crossing a street and you help him, but later you knock him down on the sidewalk. Do you recognize such behavior? We act in this manner as long as we are subject to the five desires, and harming others will cause our merit and virtue to leak away.

In Taiwan a student sought the help of a teacher in writing his dissertation. The teacher provided guidance and the student was very grateful. However, after the student graduated, the teacher claimed that he had written the dissertation for the student. When the student heard this, he was hurt and angry. First, the teacher helped him, then he hurt him. The teacher destroyed a friendship. This is an act which has outflow.

The Buddha also addresses the “great bodhisattvas.” People who have only recently generated the bodhi mind are usually not on the same level as great bodhisattvas. Sometimes we call them ordinary sentient being bodhisattvas, as distinct from saint bodhisattvas. The attainment of a saint bodhisattva or great bodhisattva never regresses, so a great bodhisattva is also called a “non-regressing bodhisattva.” A bodhisattva who is close to Buddhahood is also called a great bodhisattva. In Chinese we do in fact sometimes use the term “small bodhisattva,” but we use it to refer to children who go to temple. Maybe they, too, will grow up to be great bodhisattvas.

When the Buddha cites those, “who were born from Buddhahood” he refers to the fact that, although our physical life comes from our par-

ents, our wisdom comes from Buddhadharma. Where does Buddhadharma come from? — from the Buddha. We say that wisdom, “is born from Buddha’s mouth,” “emanates from the Dharma,” and “attains part of the Buddhadharma.” Wisdom “is born from Buddha’s mouth” because our wisdom originates from the Dharma the Buddha spoke. It “emanates from the Dharma” because



drawing by Giora Carmi

if we follow the Dharma vexations decrease and wisdom arises. When wisdom manifests, we “attain a part of the Buddhadharma.” If we attain the totality of Buddhadharma, we attain Buddhahood.

We have listened to Buddhadharma; we have already taken the embryo of Buddhadharma into our being. The Dharma has rooted in our minds and it will continue to grow if we continue to practice. Eventually, we are able to use the Dharma to resolve the vexations we encounter in everyday life. When we do that, our wisdom emanates from the Dharma, and we act from the Dharma.

Buddha says that Bodhisattvas and Arahats have “...reached the state beyond study...” Leading to this attainment, there are three kinds of “study towards no outflow.” The first cultivates ethics,

or the precepts; the second cultivates samadhi, or stillness of mind; and the third cultivates wisdom. If we cultivate the precepts, samadhi and wisdom, they will lead us toward the state of no outflow. Beyond this point there is no need for study.

People often think that practice is meditation, and that meditation leads to enlightenment. But what does enlightenment mean? — freedom from vexations and the realization of wisdom. Seeking this end, people employ methods such as counting breaths or the contemplation of impurity. This is cultivation of samadhi, but by itself it is not enough. Conduct in daily life is extremely important. Actions, verbal expression, and the thoughts and feelings in the mind, constitute what Buddhists call the three kinds of actions or the three kinds of karma. If actions of body, speech and mind accord with Buddhist guidelines, then the precepts are fol-

lowed. Contrary actions break the precepts. Act in this way and the cultivation of samadhi will not be successful and wisdom will not manifest. Only proper actions accord with the precepts, cultivate samadhi, and manifest wisdom. When wisdom manifests and vexations disappear, you will no longer want to commit acts that cause vexation to yourself or others. There is no more need for study.

If you truly understand this, then you have reached the state beyond study. Most probably you understand the words, but not the true meaning of “beyond study.” To guide us in this pursuit, Shakyamuni Buddha asked the great bodhisattvas and arahats to describe the methods they used to reach the point of no outflow and the state beyond study.

Buddha said to the bodhisattvas and arahats,

"When you developed your minds to awaken to the eighteen fields of sense, which did you regard as the best means of perfection and by what methods did you enter the state of Samadhi?" "The eighteen fields of sense" comprise the six sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), the six sense objects (the objects of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought), and the six sense consciousnesses (consciousness of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thoughts). These constitute the physical and mental self. "Awakening to the eighteen fields of sense,..." means that the great bodhisattvas and arahats were enlightened to the emptiness of the fields of sense and to the emptiness of the physical and mental aggregate we call the self.

The *Surangama Sutra* does not use the term "Samadhi" in the ordinary sense of complete meditative absorption. Here it refers to Surangama Samadhi, the ultimate state of enlightenment. Buddha asked the twenty-five great practitioners who were present, "What was the nature of your practice such that you attained non-obstruction with respect to the eighteen fields and thereby reached Great Enlightenment?"

"When you developed your minds..." translates literally as, "When you initially generated the

mind..." This phrase refers first, to generating bodhi mind — the aspiration to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. If you think only of your own salvation, that is not "generating the mind." Second, "when you initially generated the mind..." refers to the methods of practice used to cultivate bodhi mind. It is not advisable to change your method of practice often. Otherwise you allow the initial "generation of mind" to slip away too often.



photo by Lawrence Waldron

In the Ch'an tradition the first method a practitioner uses is called "the original practice," or "the original practice hua-tou," and it is best to persist with this method. We should strive to enter deeply into practice through this Dharma Door. When we help other sentient beings, it is appropriate to use innumerable methods, but in our own practice, we should adhere to one. Entering deeply into the practice through the original method, we may help others with a variety of methods. This is called "Completion Without Obstruction."

The generation of bodhi mind may at first be pleasant, but it is difficult to sustain. That is why Amitabha Buddha made forty-eight great vows when he first generated bodhi mind, and when Samantabhadra Bodhisat-

tva first generated Bodhi mind he made ten great vows. Although it is common for practitioners to have virtuous thoughts and aspirations when they generate bodhi mind, as they encounter difficulties on the Path these often slip away. Some people say, "Shih-fu, becoming a bodhisattva is too difficult. Let me practice for my own good first. Let's discuss bodhisattvahood later." Other people find practice altogether too difficult, and say, "Shih-fu, I think there is no hope for me in this lifetime. Next lifetime I'll practice."

These practitioners are regressing from their initial generation of bodhi mind. Such thoughts require you to rededicate yourself to your goal.

During retreats people are often moved and quite grateful for what they have experienced. They express these feelings in the discussion at the end of the retreat. Someone once said, "I vow to be your disciple, lifetime after lifetime, until I attain buddhahood." That is a great vow. I said to him, "If you are still around when I come back for my next life, you will be old and I'll be a young monk. Will you still take me as your Shih-fu? He answered, "It doesn't matter whether a teacher is old or young. I will still follow you." However, shortly after the retreat he heard of a master reputed to enlighten his disciples in a matter of days, and went off to follow that master.

What happened to his vow to follow me until he attained buddhahood? When he made that vow, it did not indicate genuine generation of bodhi mind. He made the vow only because of his emotional state at the end of the retreat. When you generate bodhi mind, be cautious, and do not expect too much of yourself right away, or you will become discouraged. Do not say that you will follow me, say that you will follow the Buddha, or vow that you will persevere in your method of practice until you attain Buddhahood. These are great vows indeed.

I stated that it is not good to change your method often. It is also inadvisable to have several masters at once. Many intelligent people come to me when they already have other masters, and I ask them, "Why are you here?" They often feel that it can't hurt to have one more master, no matter how many they have already. They think they can get a little from each, and end up with a lot. It's as if each master gave them a dollar, so that if they have ten masters, they end up with ten dollars.

Studying with a master is more like going to a physician. If you go to many physicians for the same condition and each gives you a different prescription, the combination of drugs may be ineffective or even harmful, although one prescription alone may provide the cure.

Today I have discussed three important ideas. The first is "without outflow", when merit and virtue no longer outflow, or decrease. To reach the state without outflow we must practice the three studies: precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. If we act properly, we accumulate merit and virtue, but we can easily undermine our efforts by doing what we should not do.

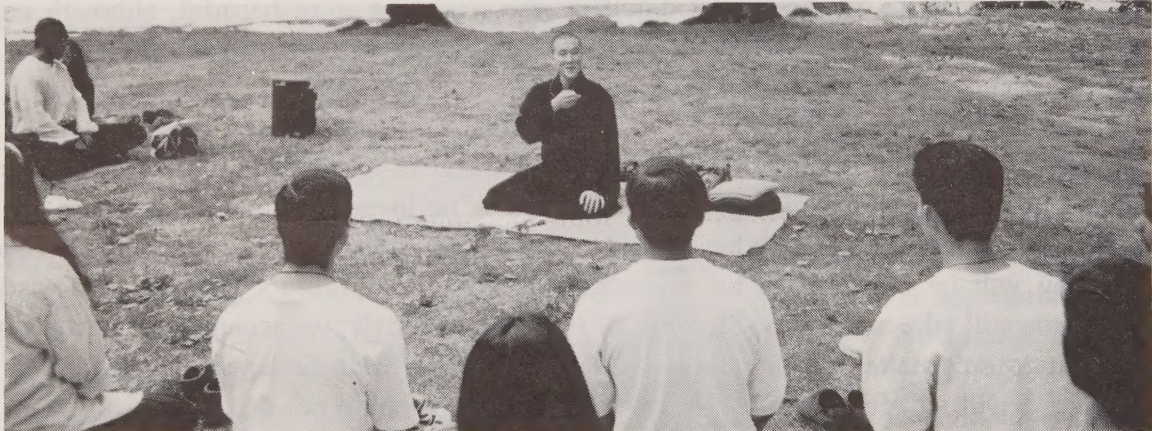
The second idea is "born from the Dharma." Our wisdom derives from, is born of, the Dharma spoken by the Buddha. We use the Dharma to free ourselves of vexations and in this way our wisdom will manifest.

The generation of mind is the third important thing I covered. This always refers to the generation of bodhi mind, the mind of the Mahayana bodhisattva. To generate and cultivate bodhi mind, we should adhere to one method of practice. When our effort slackens, and we regress on the Path, we must invoke the initial generation of bodhi mind, persevere, and ultimately succeed.

News From the Center:

On July 9th S. N. Goenka, a well known Vipassana teacher, visited Master Sheng-yen at Nung Ch'an Monastery in Taiwan. The two masters spent time in conversation, presented a public dialogue, and S. N. Goenka talked about the experiences which lead him to embrace Vipassana. He is a retired industrialist and a former leader of the Indian community in Burma. S. N. Goenka also visited other Buddhist monasteries and organizations in Taiwan as part of an ongoing exchange between Buddhists in Taiwan and those of other nationalities and sects.

Saravati Productions visited the Center on Sept. 11 to video tape meditation and chanting services and interview the left-home people for a video investigating the Buddhist view of social issues. The videographers were particularly interested in Buddhism's "multiculturalism", and the relationships between ethnic and racial groups within American Buddhism. In answering their questions, Guo-gu Shi said that the basis of multicultural understanding in Buddhism is compassion: all beings do not want to suffering and want to attain happiness.



Guo-gu Shi speaks to Dharma Day participants in Central Park

On Sept. 16th the Center hosted a Dharma Day for young adults, which was attended by 29 people ages 18 to 29. The theme of the day was "Finding Your Direction and Knowing Where You Are". Guo-gu Shi talked to participants about causes and conditions, knowing yourself, finding and maintaining a direction, dealing with emotional ups and downs, spiritual life and selflessness.



Dorothy Weiner

Upcoming Events:

On Oct. 10 Guo-gu Shi will speak on "Transforming Suffering" at the invitation of the International Buddhist Council of NY. The talk will be from 7:30 to 9:30 P.M. in the Red Room, St. Paul's Chapel (lower level), Columbia University. Take the #1 or #9 subway or M10 bus to 116th St. and Broadway.



A Dharma Gathering will take place on Friday, Oct. 27 from 6:00 to 9:30 P.M. Master Sheng-yen will discuss "Buddhist Ethics in Everyday Life." Everyone is welcome. Please RSVP



Master Sheng-yen will give a special public lecture on "Revealing the Nature of Mind", on Sunday, Oct. 29, from 1:30 to 3:00 P.M.



On November 6th and 7th, from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M., **Master Sheng-yen will lecture** at the Taipei Theater, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, NY, NY. This Program is cosponsored by the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, the Chinese Information and Cultural Center, Dr. Kenneth G. Zysk, Director of the New York University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures and Dr. Grace Fung of the New York Multicultural Resource Center at Hunter College. Master Sheng-yen will speak on "Zen and Mental Health" on Monday, and on "Zen and Environmental Protection" the next night.



The Beginners' Meditation Workshop, a four-hour long introduction to Ch'an practice, will be given on Saturdays, Oct. 28, Nov. 18 and Dec. 23, from 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. in English, and from 2:00 to 6:00 P.M. in Chinese. Please call to register.



There will be **One Day Ch'an Retreats** on Nov. 4 and Dec. 9. Please call for further information and to register.



On Oct. 14 there will be a day of **Recitation of Buddha's Name**, from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.



The Friday Night Ch'an Sitting Group, under Master Sheng-yen's direction, will be held on Nov. 3, 10, 17 and Dec. 1, 8, 15 and 22. This is an opportunity for group practice and guidance from Shih-fu. There is also a short talk by Shih-fu each night. Please call for further information.



The Special Wednesday Ch'an Class will also resume when Master Sheng-yen returns. Shih-fu will continue to comment on the letters of Master Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1088-1163) Ta-hui revived the Lin-Chi (Jp. Rinzai) school of Ch'an, and encouraged the use of hua-tou in meditation. Many of his letters were written to lay student, and address the concerns of Buddhist householders. Classes will be held on Nov. 1, 8, 15, 22 and Dec. 6, 13, and 20. Please call for more information.



This fall's **Intensive Seven Day Ch'an Retreats** will be from Friday, Nov. 24 to Friday, Dec. 1, and from Monday, Dec. 25 to Monday, Jan. 1, 1996.

Ongoing Activities, except during retreats:

Recitation Group: Mon. evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M. Amitabha Buddha recitation in Chinese, and prostrations.

Group Meditation: Tues. and Thurs. evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M.

Ch'an Sitting Group: Fri. 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., with a social half hour until 9:30. An evening of sitting and walking meditation, with a short talk on the application of Ch'an to daily life or the concepts and methods of Ch'an. This is also an opportunity to ask Master Sheng-yen or one of the resident monks for guidance in practice. Please call for details.

Sunday Program: Meditation, chanting, vegetarian lunch, afternoon talk and afternoon meditation. 10:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

First Saturday of each month: One day Ch'an retreat, 9:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. Please call for details and to register.

Last Saturday of each month: Beginners' Meditation Workshop. In English: 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. In Chinese 2:00 to 6:00. Please call for details and to register.

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